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ABSTRACT

Researchers believe that writing, and the writing process, are integral parts of any grade level curriculum. Since Writer's Workshop is an essential part of this process, an examination of the effects of first graders' participation in Writer's Workshop was studied to determine whether or not this enabled them to become more confident writers, and also whether or not this enabled them to become more proficient in using descriptive words in their writing. It was hypothesized that first grade students do not become more confident writers, nor do they become more proficient in using descriptive words in their writing by participating in Writer's Workshop. This study compared the effects of Writer's Workshop on 24 first grade students in the East Brunswick Public School District. The class consisted of 12 girls and 12 boys. The children participated in Writer's Workshop on a weekly basis and they were administered pretests and posttests to measure any changes in their attitudes towards writing. The results of the data showed that this particular class' participation in a weekly Writer's Workshop did permit the children to become more confident writers, as well as allow them to become more proficient in using descriptive words in their writing. The findings of this study did not support the hypothesis. Contains 32 references and 2 tables of data; appendixes contain pre- and post-test questionnaires and a writing rubric. (Author/RS)

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ED 432 753

The Effects of a First Grader's Participation in a Writer's Workshop On Their Ability To Become More Confident and More Descriptive Writers

by

Robin Alyse Bayer

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Master of Arts Degree

Kean University

May 1999

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Abstract

Researchers believe that writing, and the writing process, are integral parts of any grade level curriculum. Since Writer's Workshop is an essential part of this process, an examination of the effects of a first grader's participation in Writer's Workshop was studied to determine whether or not this enabled them to become more confident writers, and also whether or not this enabled them to become more proficient in using descriptive words in their writing.

It was hypothesized that first grade students do not become more confident writers, nor do they become more proficient in using descriptive words in their writing by participating in Writer's Workshop.

This study compared the effects of Writer's Workshop on twenty four first grade students in the East Brunswick Public School District. The class consisted of twelve girls and twelve boys. The children participated in Writer's Workshop on a weekly basis, and they were administered pretests and posttests to measure any changes in their attitudes towards writing.

The results of the data showed that this particular class' participation in a weekly Writer's Workshop did permit the children to become more confident writers, as well as allow them to become more proficient in using descriptive words in their writing. The findings of this study did not support the hypothesis.

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I would like to thank my mother and my father for always encouraging me to continue my education. They believed in me when I didn't always believe in myself. I wouldn't have come so far in my life had it not been for them. Their constant support and reassurance throughout the entire writing of this thesis is appreciated more than words can ever say. I hope I always continue to make them proud of me. I love both of them very, very much.

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A. Writing Workshop Questionnaire - Pretest
B. Writing Workshop Questionnaire - Posttest
C. Writing Rubric

Writing appears to be a major and essential part of a child's academic growth and performance. It is a way for him/her to express themselves in a more "personal" way. The skills and techniques that are taught in a Writer's Workshop appear to be invaluable to a child becoming a "life-long" writer. It is thought that if a child is taught to "love" writing, then they will write more frequently and for many different reasons. (i.e. academic, recreation, etc.) If a child participates in a Writer's Workshop, and is successful, then this will lead, hopefully, to a more positive attitude about writing and will give the child the confidence and the skills that they need to "write for life."

"Most of the philosophy of Writer's Workshop centers on the belief that children should be treated like real writers. If we treat children like real writers, and give them tasks that "real" writers should be able to complete, then they will feel like real writers themselves." (Klenow, 1995).

"The writing workshop is a noisy, active, productive place...The noise, however, doesn't deter productivity...In fact, it often stimulates conversations that wouldn't ordinarily occur." (Maxwell, 1993).

"Writing instruction has traditionally been characterized by a reliance on skills worksheets and synthetic writing stimulants. By the early 1980s, the failure of traditional skills-based schools in meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students became apparent. Subsequently, the whole language philosophy (Goodman, 1986), based on the idea that reading and writing should be done for authentic purposes, gained credibility. As the whole language movement gained momentum in American classrooms, more teachers began to adopt the student-centered writing workshop as a way of teaching writing." (Strech, 1994).

"Successful teaching practices are in danger of growing stagnant if educators do not consistently strive to improve them. The writing workshop approach to writing

instruction is an example of a successful teaching practice. Given ample time to create, coupled with ownership of topic ideas, students become more productive and enthusiastic writers. Nevertheless, there is always room for change and improvement in established routines." (Colby, 1996).

"I believe that writing workshop serves an important literacy function in the classroom. When someone mentions Writing Workshop, you probably think of the writing process, the proofreader's marks, the author's chair...But Writing Workshop is more than a step-by-step process for producing pretty prose - it's a mind-set for approaching writing, and for approaching kids." (Henkin, 1995).

"The term "writer's workshop" refers to an environment conceived to encourage written expression. Because writing and exposing one's own thoughts is risky business, children need to know that their environment is a predictable, safe place for them to take risks. And if they are expected to be in control of what they write and do, they need to have control over such simple decisions as getting their own paper when they need it or asking a classmate for assistance." (Bunce-Crim, 1991).

Hypothesis

Additional research on this controversial subject is necessary since prior results may prove to be equivocal. The following study was established to test the hypothesis that first grade students do not become more confident writers, nor do they become more proficient in using descriptive words in their writing, by participating in Writer's Workshop.

Procedures

The research was conducted in one K-5 elementary school in the East Brunswick Public School System, which is located in an upper-middle class suburban community in central New Jersey. .The purpose of this study was to find out whether or not first graders' participation in a Writer's Workshop would enable them to become

more confident writers, and also whether or not this would enable them to become more proficient in using descriptive words in their writing. To meet this purpose, a multi-step procedural process was used to determine whether these elements help the first grade children achieve the abovementioned goals. This multi-step procedural process included many significant elements: process writing, cooperative learning, editing, publishing, brainstorming, minilessons, etc.

The Writer's Workshop was held on a weekly basis, with the children becoming active participants two to three times a week. Each workshop began the same way, with an introductory 5-10 minute minilesson where the children were introduced to the specific topic at hand for that particular day. These topics included, but were not limited to the following: sentence structure, correct capitalization, punctuation, grammar, subject/verb agreement, using descriptive words and phrases, abbreviations, and contractions.

Each Writing Workshop session began with a 5-10 minute minilesson, where the specific area of instruction for the day was introduced. These minilessons focused on specific areas of writing. One individualized skill was introduced for each particular minilesson. This skill was then focused on heavily throughout the workshop activities for that day. The children were asked to perform many particular tasks throughout the workshop which reflected on their knowledge and comprehension of the skill. Also, the piece of writing which they worked on throughout the particular workshop day focused on whatever skill(s) were taught during the minilesson at the beginning of the workshop.

As soon as the minilesson concluded, the actual "writing workshop" began. The teacher modeled her own writing along with the children, so they were able to see that writing is something that is not only done in a classroom, that it is an ongoing activity which continues throughout one's entire life. Then, after the children had begun their

individual writing activity for the period, the teacher circulated and worked with individual children. Sometimes, while the children were working, she chose to move from table to table and hold mini-conferences with the children, so that she could see how their writing progressed and also to address any questions or concerns that the children might have had. This conference time also gave the children the time to tell her what they were working on, and also for the children to ask her opinion about their writing. The teacher developed rapport for conferencing with the children about their pieces, and was prepared to offer "constructive" criticism if necessary. She also helped the children "sound out" words with which they were having difficulty. Children were also afforded the opportunity to hold peer conferences with their classmates to get and give feedback, and also to assist others if the opportunity presented itself.

This block of writing time lasted for approximately 35-40 minutes. This time was used by the children to engage in the writing process while the teacher focused on conferencing with the students, and worked on revision, editing and publishing. The teacher focused on five main areas of concern in conjunction with the different procedures of writing. These five areas included rehearsal, drafting, revising, editing and sharing. A brief explanation of what encompasses each of these areas was given.

Rehearsal: Incorporates the different ways that children plan what they are going to write. They may do this by thinking, talking and reading.

Drafting: This is where the actual writing takes place. The children are allowed to continue talking about their writing (casual conferencing) during this block of time.

Revising: This involves going over what the children have written This is a continuous process which is ongoing as the children write.

Editing: This is where the children work with an "editor" (teacher, parent, peer, etc....) in order to prepare the piece of writing to be published. This is the part where the focus is on standardizing writing conventions and spelling.

Sharing: This process may include one of the following: the children are able to choose, if they so desire, one of the following ways to share their piece; author's chair, hanging the piece on the sharing board, taking it home, or even something as simple as reading their piece to, and sharing it with a friend.

The final step in the "writing process" was sharing. This was the part of the writing workshop where the children were afforded the opportunity to share whatever they had worked on during the previous block of writing time. The "audience" may also, during this time of sharing, give their feedback and commentary to the person who has volunteered to share.

A pretest was administered to each child before they began writer's workshop. These tests consisted of questions regarding the child's attitudes about writing, and were meant to measure their confidence levels. Each child submitted four pieces of writing from their writing folders (cumulative), which they considered to be their "best" work.

Then during the final weeks of writer's workshop, the same children were given a "posttest" which consisted of the same questions that were contained in the pretest. An additional question was asked during the posttest to see if the students' attitudes towards writing had changed at all. The children again, submitted four pieces of writing which they considered to be their "best" work.

The pretest and posttest data was analyzed to determine if any changes in attitude or in the ability to use more descriptive words in their writing had taken place.

Results

The attitude scores of a writing pretest and posttest (Appendix A and Appendix B) as well as a six month participation in a writing workshop were studied to determine whether or not a first grader's participation in a writing workshop would enable them to become more confident writers, and also whether or not this would enable them to

become more proficient in using descriptive words in their writing. The mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for each section. Student's t was used to determine if there was a significant difference between the means of pretest and posttest results. As can be seen in Table One, the results of the pre and post writing rubric

Table 1

Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Writing Rubric Results

Samples	M	SD	t
Pretest	1.08	0.64	7.09
Posttest	2.83	1.05	

Significant <.01 level

(Appendix C) scores showed that there was a significant difference, below the .01 level, favoring the posttest results. There was a 1.75 point mean difference in favor of the posttest results.

The results of the pretest and posttest attitude questionnaire proved by a large margin that writing workshops improve the feelings and attitudes that first graders have about writing, as well as how they feel about themselves as writers. (Appendix D). Pretest results indicated that 28% of children felt happy when their teacher said that it was writing time, while posttest results showed a jump to 54%. When children were asked if they like to write, pretest results indicated 25% said yes, while posttest results showed a rise to 71%. The number of children who favored self-selected writing topics as opposed to teacher-selected topics rose from 63% to 75%. The final question on the questionnaire asked the children how they would describe themselves as writers. Pretest scores resulted in the following: 21% said great, 25% said okay, 33% said

good, and 21% said not good. When the children were asked the same question on the post evaluation questionnaire, the following results were found: 63% said great, 7% said okay, 17% said good, and 13% said not good.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study did not permit the acceptance of the hypothesis that first grade students do not become more confident writers, nor do they become more proficient in using descriptive words in their writing, by participating in Writer's Workshop. The mean scores proved to be in favor of the posttest results.

Since the current study was limited to only the effects of a first grader's participation in a Writer's Workshop for a six month period, a future study is recommended to look at other important factors that could affect the writing styles, abilities, and attitudes of children towards writing. These other factors are pre-school and kindergarten experience, the curriculum, the time spent on writing, and the use of a larger sample.

Writer's Workshop: Related Literature

The first article that I researched was "Pop-Ups: The Rise and Fall of One Convention in a First Grade Writing Workshop." (1991) This article was written by Brenda Power Miller. This article details a qualitative study in which the researcher spent five months examining how social interactions during writing workshops in a first grade classroom affected texts produced. The researcher specifically focused on the rise and fall of one popular convention in the children's writing, the pop-up. Connections are made between the emergence of this first grade convention and the evolution of adult genres documented by literary researchers. Particular attention was paid to whole class discussions of student texts, analyzed by examining who demonstrated the most power in influencing the popularity of different conventions in the class. Implications discussed include the need for more detailed analyses of how power is gained and lost in writing workshops that try to promote egalitarian values.

The study the researcher conducted had one major focus..."what conventions children in one first grade classroom accept and use in their writing, and how these conventions gain or lost popularity." But as the researcher states, in a larger sense, this study is really about the context and contents of reading and writing.

The study took place at Mast Way Elementary School in Lee, New Hampshire. It was a K-5 school in a rural community. The researcher was to be an observer in the classroom over a six month period. Every morning the researcher would circulate amongst the children in one first grade classroom as they worked during morning writing time. She would ask questions and conduct interviews to assess the children's attitudes towards writing.

The use of pop-ups in this particular classroom became most prevalent during the data gathering period. In their initial attempts at pop up books, "the children integrated the convention into stories they'd already been working on in writer's

workshop." This convention proved to be extremely successful based on the facts that all twenty two children in the classroom that was studied had increased levels of writing performance, as well as a heightened interest in writing after these "pop-ups" were used in their classroom in conjunction with their weekly participation in a writer's workshop over the previous six months in which the study was taking place.

The definition and emergence of the pop-up in this first grade classroom is quite specific, reflecting the format of the literacy instruction program, and the influence of popular readers and writers.

The teacher and students in this study work as a collective in creating, accepting and rejecting conventions in texts. Much of what the researcher presented in her findings are "not the images of individual writers and readers toiling alone, but the sound of many voices talking around texts in large and small groups." The concept of child-defined conventions provides bridges between the landscapes of the new fiction of the collective, literary analysis, and process teaching methods. "Understanding how and why children accept or reject conventions in texts reveals what they value, not only in texts, but in social and academic settings."

The next research article was entitled, "A Kindergarten Writing Workshop: How Kindergarten Students Grow as Writers." (Hertz and Heydenberk, 1997). This study was conducted in a suburban-rural Pennsylvania school district with 5400 students located in the eastern part of the state. "A half-day kindergarten class of 19 children participated in process writing activities during a five month time period. The students were from middle class families and represented a typical range of ability levels. The kindergarten teacher was a 15 year veteran whose exposure to process writing consisted of two years of involvement with the school district's process writing staff development program."

Using a pre and post test approach, the kindergarten students were measured on invented spelling, writing vocabulary, and characteristics of their own writing. They were also evaluated on their spelling strategies using the Mann, Tobin and Wilson Spelling Test. The Inventory of Writing Vocabulary for Rating Progess was also used to measure the students' writing vocabulary. Finally, the Metropolitan Readiness Tests Level II, Form P, were used to assess the reading readiness of the process writers. Following is a basic description of the writing program that the researchers observed, and a summary of the quantitative findings, and finally, the findings that emerged directly from the observations.

Description of the Writing Program:

This particular kindergarten class participated in the writing workshops three times a week for approximately 45 minutes a session. The workshops followed the formats of a mini-lesson, writing time, and a group sharing session. During these workshops, the students were afforded the opportunity to write about their own choice of topic, and they received feedback about their writing from teachers, as well as peers. The mini-lessons contained the introduction of a particular skill, and a "warm-up" activity to help students brainstorm ideas for writing. During the "writing time", the children were allowed to sit and write about their topic, and this was also the time to peer conference, as well as to meet with the teacher. Finally, the group sharing sessions at the end of the workshop. This gives a chance for the mini-lesson skill(s) to be reinforced as "well as to give selected students the chance to sit in the "author's chair" and share their stories with the class." This study was ongoing in the classroom for four months.

The following areas of the students' writing were evaluated: a) spelling strategies, b) written vocabulary, and c) language level, directional principles and message quality of their stories. The class of 19 "kindergarten writers made appreciable gains in writing, demonstrating significant improvement at the .05 level in all writing skill areas." The Mann, Tobin and Wilson (1987) Invented Spelling Test was used to evaluate the students' spelling strategies. By the end of the program, the paired t test ($t=5.51$, $p<0.05$) revealed significant growth in students' spelling ability. All but one student could give at least two letters to capture part of each spelling word phonetically. On the Inventory of Writing Vocabulary for Rating Progress (Robinson, 1973), "the students showed significant improvement in their ability to write more words using the paired t test ($t=5.17$, $p<0.05$). The mean number of words written on the vocabulary pretest and posttest (Robinson, 1973), were 7.42 and 13.47, respectively. "It is notable that students wrote more words than they were given credit for on The Inventory of Writing Vocabulary for Rating Progress. This test demanded conventional spelling to award credit."

"Despite the range of abilities of the kindergarten students, process writing instruction allowed them to show appreciable, measurable gains in their writing skills. Furthermore, since the students participated in regularly scheduled writing workshops, as opposed to more casual participation in a writing center, they gained a rich awareness of the steps involved in composing stories and were able to verbalize writing process procedures when questioned." Students were able to demonstrate the maturity level needed to work within the writing workshop format. "In addition, the writing workshop provided an interactive environment for learning. It appeared to be an effective means to develop the students' language skills. While not all students were developmentally ready to conference correctly, the peer sharing provided an opportunity for them to receive feedback, however general it may have been."

The kindergarten writing workshop has distinct advantages for early literacy development. Although it follows a structured format, it can be altered to fit the needs of the students in the classroom. "While the teacher we worked with hoped that students would use the skills to which they had been exposed during class mini-lessons, he accepted and celebrated all approximations of their written language. Thus he allowed his students to progress at their own rate and to grow as true writers."

The next article was entitled, "A View to Writing: The Effectiveness of ITV as a Model for Process Writing." This research was conducted to determine the effectiveness of an ITV program, "Fins, Feathers and Fur," which was designed to model process writing and to teach several writing conventions to primary grade children. The researcher wanted to find out the following information by the conclusion of the study:

1. Will children demonstrate their learning of the specific ITV program objectives?

2. Will the use of ITV act as a writing motivator and instructional guide for children and teachers?

3. What aspects of this ITV program are most valuable for instruction?

4. Will teachers report ITV to be an effective instructional tool?

There were three second grade teachers from Carmel Central School who agreed to participate in the study. The groups for the study were heterogeneously grouped.

Methods for the Study:

The researcher presented two writing workshops which were designed to demonstrate aspects of process writing that were highlighted on this ITV program. Two

of the second grade teachers agreed to the experimental conditions and they were given the following instructions:

1. obtain a pre-writing sample from the children prior to showing any videotapes
2. introduce each video program (pre-viewing activities in the Teacher's Guide)
3. show the videotaped program twice per lesson
4. ask children to complete the program worksheets after the second viewing

One second grade teacher and her students agreed to be the control group. This group was given the same workshop instructions, the same manual, utilization packets and program objective worksheets. Instead of viewing the videotapes, the control group teacher used instructional guidelines from the manual to meet the lesson objectives. Basically, the control group differed from the experimental group by not using the video programs to introduce aspects of the writing process.

The reading series "Fins, Feathers and Fur", is made up of 15 fifteen minute video programs designed to provide adjunct instruction in writing process to, specifically, second grade children. Each program models the writing process while highlighting one aspect for instructional purposes such as brainstorming, drafting, paragraph writing, maintaining topic coherence, and time sequencing. In addition, punctuation and capitalization as well. The results of the study proved to be quite positive. Teachers' responses were quite favorable regarding the program as a writing motivator and instructional guide. The teachers also stated that, "their children would have met some of the objectives and named brainstorming, punctuation, capitalization and sentence writing as activities that were part of their classroom instruction in reading and language arts." The teachers also identified webbing, sequencing, and indenting as the areas that the children would not have become proficient, were it not for the videotapes. This is proven by the fact that there was a significant difference existing between the experimental groups and the control groups.

By examining the children's work and analyzing the statistics of the program objectives, it is summarized that this particular ITV series "was successful in presenting the stated writing objectives to students. In addition, the series provided teachers with and structure for teaching the writing process. Data obtained from teacher interviews and observation of the writing samples suggests that structure in the form of brainstorming, explicit teacher directions regarding the writing product, pictures and lined paper resulted in children writing more information about a topic."

"Insiders And Outsiders In First-Grade Writing Workshops: Gender and Equity Issues" (Henkin, 1995) is based on a woman who participated in, and studied weekly in a first grade writing workshop during the 1991-1992 school year. The focus of this research study, "was on the collaborative culture of the writing workshop and some of the factors that inhibited or enhanced literacy development." The researcher conferred with the children, interviewed them, and "acted as another facilitator." "The data collection included field notes of classroom observations, audiotapes and videotapes of writing conferences, and student and teacher interviews. Both the classroom teacher and I believed in writing workshop and felt that it was beneficial for all students." "By studying the collaborative culture of the writing workshop in this first grade classroom, I was surprised to see that there was more than one literacy club and that some students were offered membership into the literacy clubs while others were not. I thought that the classroom community was strong and supportive for every child. I discovered that there were several literacy clubs operating in the classroom and that, as in Lensmire's (1992) study of a third grade class, some students were excluded because of gender and social status."

The boys and girls in the class worked well together when they were required to, but if they were afforded the choice, they chose, most of the time, to work in same sex

groups. The researcher was quite disturbed to realize how much she DIDN'T see as she participated in the classroom community. For a long time, the researcher didn't even realize that the "girls were almost exclusively conferring with each other, even though I spent time with them every week."

The researcher still believes that writing workshop serves a very important function in the classroom. She now believes, "that as teachers we must help our students to examine injustice and take action. For children to grow up and create a more democratic world, we must insure that they experience democracy in our classrooms. Students need to talk about injustices and change them."

"The Mr. And Mrs. Club: The Value of Collaboration in Writers' Workshop," (Freedman, 1995), is based on a teacher-research project which took place in the researcher's classroom. Being a second/third grade teacher, the researcher found herself being curious about the "value of the informal collaboration that occurs in this writing time. Therefore, I began a teacher-research project in my classroom to observe what happened in student self-sponsored writing and during the writing workshop period. What types of stories did second and third graders write during writing workshop? Did the children's collaboration influence the nature of the story topics? Would there be more to learn from the stories about the children's collaboration? Could they learn from one another?"

The researcher's classroom participated in a writing workshop for approximately 50 minutes per afternoon, every afternoon. Each workshop began with a short mini-lesson focusing on a particular concept or drill. Immediately after the mini-lesson, the students had about 35 minutes to "engage in the writing process" while the teacher focused on conferencing with students for revisions, editing and publishing. The students were afforded a lot of "freedom" to work on a piece of writing for any length of

time and may move freely from one piece of their own writing to another. "At the conclusion of the writing workshop each day, the children participated in an author's chair, where individual students share pieces of writing, and the audience gives feedback and commentary."

"One story topic began in late September, exploded in early November, and became the dominant story topic pattern through the remainder of the school year." What emerged from this came to be known as "The Mr. and Mrs. Stories." Each of these stories centered around a pretend couple with a real problem. (ex.....Mr. and Mrs. Taxproblem, about the everyday life of a couple with a tax problem).

The researcher studied the Mr. and Mrs. Book Clubs for a couple of months, and she came up with some very interesting observations and conclusions. "It seemed that the Mr. and Mrs. stories provided different things for different students in the classroom. For students with highly developed writing strategies, the story patterns provided the opportunity to create a complex story with the help and collaboration of others in the classroom. They created strong characters, elaborated structures, well-developed plots, and outstanding writing pieces. For students at a lower level of the developmental continuum, the collaboration supported their opportunities for writing more complex texts, with elaborated structures and stronger characters than they had created before."

The researcher stated at the conclusion of her article that she believed that her classroom community was built mainly through informal collaboration. The students were strongly influential of each other by means of choice of writing topic as well as the content and structure of their work. The researcher also tells us that the students in this particular classroom represented quite a diverse mix of abilities, with the majority being the average to above average range in reading proficiency. She came to the

conclusion that "the children's social interactions in this classroom were forceful in the context of our writer's workshop."

The next article was entitled, "Toward understanding one another: Second graders' use of gendered language and story styles." (McAuliffe, 1993).

"This yearlong study of a whole language classroom offers important insights into second grade students' use of gendered language during informal interactions in writer's workshop."

This study focused on a suburban Midwestern school district. The twenty seven second grade students were from middle and upper middle socioeconomic families of Eastern European, Greek and Continental Indian descent.

The researcher chose to research children's gendered speech in a second grade whole language classroom which had a child-centered learning environment rich in authentic children's literature and process writing. She focused on the interactions among students and teacher and how discussion and conferring affected students' writing and reading.

Previous studies (Deborah Tannen, 1990), which researched language use of males and females concluded that powerful gender differences in ways of talking often develop by age three. "An extensive across-age research project in the U.S. explored how friends talked to each other suggests that consequences of language style differences between the sexes are most striking in elementary school." (Thorne 1986; White 1989).

Research conducted by Brian Sutton-Smith (1981), analyzed oral stories of 5-10 year old children. He found differences between boys and girls in both content and styles of problem/solution. Boys often resolved the plot by having a hero overcome a villain while girls reach resolution through alliance.

Sheila McAuliffe joined the class as a participant-observer for two hours each Friday during the school year. The activities in the reading-language arts block developed around the themes that emerged from the children's reading and writing. Approximately 45 minutes of each language arts block was used for writer's workshop. After writer's workshop, 20 minutes was used for "author's chair."

One of her research goals - to discover the nature of the differences between male and female language styles - developed during the process of listening to students' drafts of their stories. When presentations were made, boys and girls reacted differently to what they had heard. Males tended to be more interested in strategies, while girls focused on relationships.

As a result of the sharing of story drafts, new research questions emerged. The researcher decided to analyze how girls and boys language and writing compared in intent and focus. She chose to narrow her research to the writing of seven of the twenty seven students - 3 girls and 4 boys.

Girls writing usually revolved around the norms of the community. "In their stories, girls felt bad when they forgot to visit friends...and relished being rewarded for a good piano lesson." In contrast, most of the boys' stories focused on battles or contests. "...the Bulls were challenged by the Lakers.....the Ninja Turtles took on an army..."

The boys and girls protagonists were quite different from one another. Most of the boy's pieces involved a protagonist who acted alone and used their skills to defend their honor. 70% of the boy's stories involved male heroes, while only 38% of the girl's writing involved female protagonists.

The author saw a definite change in writing styles as the year progressed. Students used male and female characters as protagonists. Most of the published

stories that students chose as their favorites included examples of both genders' story styles.

This yearlong study of a whole language classroom pointed out the importance of intent in the process of communication. Learners are encouraged to try to understand one another. When writers present their work, the audiences' views help to clarify original drafts. "Creating a classroom climate where negotiation of meaning is valued and where both sexes collaborate to explore their worlds and make sense of what they read is essential." Students are introduced to gender styles of both sexes when they are exposed to both male and female authors.

"An overview of the results of this research study indicates that some students had turned out elements of the other sex's story styles. Students who used characteristics from the other gender's story style broadened their repertoires." The researcher stated that teachers need to know about gender differences in story styles to better support both sexes as they develop their writing styles.

Action Research: The Implementation of Writing Workshop in the Third Grade." (Strech, 1994). "Writing instruction has traditionally been characterized by a reliance on skills worksheets and synthetic writing stimulants. By the early 1980s, the failure of traditional skills-based schools in meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students became apparent. Subsequently, the whole language philosophy, based on the idea that reading and writing should be done for authentic purposes, gained credibility. As the whole language movement gained momentum in American classrooms, more teachers began to adopt the student-centered writing workshop as a way of teaching writing."

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the "cognitive" and "affective" implications of the student-centered writing workshop approach in a third grade classroom.

The participants in this study were 27 third grade students from A.L. Gauldin Elementary School in Downey, California. Of the 27 children, 11 were female and 16 were male. Each participant in the study was administered two different instruments twice during the study. One was a Writing Workshop Questionnaire, which was "designed to elicit responses indicating the subject's attitude toward writing (affective measure)." The second was a "writing prompt designed to obtain a writing sample (cognitive measure) from each student that could be compared in terms of content and mechanics." Both instruments were created by the researcher.

The "one-group pretest-posttest design" was used in this study. Students completed the questionnaire and the writing sample two different times. After both pretests were scored, the writing workshop began, and was conducted on a daily basis.

Each workshop session consisted of the following: a mini-lesson (5-10 minutes), students report their plans for writing time (3-5 minutes), writing time (30 minutes or longer), group share (10 minutes). The researcher evaluated the following goals and objectives prior to the implementation of the workshop.

GOALS:

1. "Students will improve as writers (cognitive)."
2. "Students will exhibit a positive attitude towards writing (affective)."

OBJECTIVES:

1. "Writing workshop will take place daily from 11:00-12:00."
2. "Students will choose their own topics."
3. "Students will use the steps of the writing process to publish original pieces."
4. "Direct instruction of writing skills will take place during the mini-lesson and be based on observed needs of the class."
5. "Students will share published writing with an audience."
6. " All published work will be recognized and celebrated."

The questionnaire and writing prompt were also used to analyze post-test results. The data from both procedures "indicated positive affective and cognitive effects of the writing workshop approach." The more significant data was collected from the affective measure. Student responses to the questionnaire showed that "more students reported a positive attitude towards writing after the treatment." The amount of students who reported that they like to write increased from 48% to 78%. 22% more students spoke of themselves as "great" writers on the posttest than the pretest.

"Posttest rubric scores indicated a moderate increase in the quality of student writing." 41% of students scored a three or four (four being the highest) on the posttest as opposed to 19% on the pretest. Table 2 shows the complete results of this measure.

Table 2

Writing Sample Scores (percentage of subjects)

Score	Pretest	Posttest
4	4%	4%
3	15%	37%
2	44%	33%
1	26%	37%

The increase in writing quality shown by the writing sample was moderate. However, content levels improved significantly for many students. Many behaviors were observed during the course of this research study, which the researcher felt were worth mentioning. The researcher observed an increase in "confidence and self-reliance during writing." During the pretest, many students asked for help. However, during the administration of the posttest, all of the students worked with

independence and confidence. "The confidence alone is a worthwhile effect for conducting this study."

During the workshop time, an increase in writing vocabulary was observed by the researcher. "The feeling tone in the classroom during writing workshop time is reflective, investigative, and serious." The researcher concluded by recommending "that other teachers implement writing workshop in their classrooms. School administrators should facilitate this implementation by providing inservice training, visitations and support."

"Ways To Unintentionally Make Writing Difficult," (Labbo, Hoffman, Roser, 1995), is another research article which investigates the effects of Writer's Workshop on elementary school-age children.

Over the last two decades, research into the writing process has had a profound impact on writing instruction in the elementary school classroom. Often initiating the writing process consists of having students follow predetermined stages of prewriting (brainstorming, rehearsal, journal writing); producing a rough draft; editing and finally publishing a final form. Research findings support the fact that the writing process is not a linear series of events, but rather a passage among stages of overlapping ways. (Calkins 1982, 1986; Graves 1982, Routman 1991). Unfortunately, many teachers unintentionally make the writing process difficult by guiding students through rigid instruction.

The purpose of this study was to articulate several ways teachers may unintentionally make writing difficult for children and how they can overcome this problem. The researchers focused on Ricardo - a Hispanic first grader who had been identified as a below average reader and writer.

This research study occurred during a two week summer school literacy program. The routine consisted of listening to read alouds of picture books that had a specific theme. Students were given the opportunity to react to the stories through drawing, and painting, or by writing about feelings that were evoked. During writers' workshop, the teacher conducted mini-lessons that dealt with aspects of the writing process.

Use of the author's chair provided occasions for sharing works in progress..." (Graves and Hansen, 1983). Through activities such as this, children were immersed in a literacy-rich environment. Books were read, reread and discussed. Children became authors publishing their own books. Ricardo served as the case study because he was "representative of lower-achieving students who were also good storytellers."

The researchers observed that even though Ricardo enjoyed storytelling, he had difficulty making the transition from speech to print. The researchers "collected field notes of daily classroom observations and transcribed both videotapes of writing sessions and open ended interviews with both the teacher and the students, using these sources to better understand Ricardo's and Ms. Rivera's (teacher) perspectives on writing."

The research elicited six unintentional ways that teachers make writing difficult. "When the rules are too rigid, creativity is stifled." The researcher states that, "Ms. Rivera's and Ricardo's interactions show us ways we may have inadvertently made writing more difficult for the children we teach." The researcher also tells us that if we want to return a child's writing to its rightful owner, we can try to focus more on what the child is trying to do and less on what we are trying to teach. We can also make sure that the author's chair is available to children as an "option", not as a necessity.

Finally, we should allow children to participate in the writing process in ways that meet their needs. "Informal observation of the ways children are using the writing process and reflecting on what is working and not working for them may help teachers avoid making process writing a lifeless routine, as well as help children realize that they have many stories to tell."

The next research article is entitled "Experience Based Writing and the At-Risk Student." (Colby, Parker, Wilson). This research study was based in a third grade writing workshop, and involved the use of six interventions over a three week period. "Three of the interventions included the provision of hands-on experiences for the students, in an attempt to address the needs of the at-risk population in the class. Though this study did not quantitatively prove a significant improvement in these students' writing, it indicated a number of positive outcomes." The researchers stated that the writing workshop approach to writing instruction is an example of a successful teaching practice. "Given ample time to create, coupled with ownership of topic ideas, students become more productive and enthusiastic writers." This research study was seeking to address the needs of students who were not meeting their potential within the writing workshop.

This study was designed to occur over a three week period with two interventions taking place per week. The first intervention was the control, or "before" sample. This included a brief minilesson, and was followed by twenty minutes of students' writing. The second intervention was a "hands on experience" which was similar to the first intervention, in lieu of a minilesson. This intervention was also followed by twenty minutes of writing. The students were allotted free choice of writing topics.

This study took place in a "small community school" of about 200 students in a city school system in Central Virginia. Although the class was comprised of eighteen students...six students were used as part of the "at-risk sample group." Each of the six students used in the study were either reading below grade level or struggling to perform at grade level. Examinations of writing samples also revealed their struggles in Writer's Workshop.

This study took place over a three week time period. "Two visits were scheduled in each of the three weeks. During each visit, the whole class participated. The researchers did not wish to isolate those students considered at risk, so they included the whole class. For the purpose of this study, however, researchers collected only writing samples of those considered at risk." The first visit each week started off with a brainstorming activity (related to the week's topic), followed by a twenty minute writing period. The second visit of each week provided the researchers the opportunity to participate in "some type of relevant, sensory experience/activity," instead of a minilesson, followed by a twenty minute writing period. At the end of each writing period, the researchers collected the writing samples from each child. Over the next weeks, the children were involved in various activities which would relate to their experiences and writing that were being researched for this study. Some of these topics included nature, food and animals.

The quantitative analysis for this study took on three forms: word count, average sentence length, and a scale that measured content, creativity and language usage. The average word count for the before samples was 59 words per story. After the experience, the average word count climbed to 67.12 words per story. During the "nature" week, the before word count was 45.6, the after word count, 72 words per story. In the "animal" week, before word count was 62.4 words/story, after was 90.5 words/story.

"This study was an intervention in one classroom which sought to address the needs of at-risk students and propose a variation to the standard workshop format. As it resulted in a number of successes, a similar variation might prove beneficial in any classroom with a writing workshop." It was the intent of this research study to affirm the effectiveness of writing workshops. The subjects that were part of this study "exhibited remarkable enthusiasm" as they explored nature, made pudding, and interacted with an adorable golden retriever in the brief interventions that this study provided. "This enthusiasm was reflected in their willingness to write, their application of the experience in the written responses, and their increased tendency towards creative and original writing." There are many ways to vary the standard writing workshop, new ways to do so might be the subject of further research. The results of this study suggest that occasionally providing hands-on experiences in lieu of a mini-lesson is a variation worth trying.

Writing workshops seem to be "the way to go" in terms of helping children enhance not only their ability to become better writers, but also their desire to do so. In many cases, "integrating curriculum areas makes the material more relevant and understandable for students, while encouraging them to make practical connections as they apply the information."

"Any modification of the standard workshop has the potential to prompt increased student interest. While routines are beneficial, they ought not become monotonous. Occasionally substituting an entertaining experience for a teacher-directed mini-lesson results in enthusiasm. If it is carefully guided, and thought provoking questions are posed during the experience, thoughtful written responses are produced."

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Appendices

Writing Workshop Questionnaire - Pretest

Name _____ Date _____

1. How do you feel when your teacher says that it is writing time?

   _____

   _____

2. Do you like to write? (Circle your answer.)

   YES NO SOMETIMES

   Why or why not?

   _____

   _____

3. Do you like the teacher to give you a topic or do you like to decide on a topic yourself? (Circle your answer.)

   TEACHER GIVES TOPIC I DECIDE ON TOPIC

   Why?

   _____

   _____

4. How would you describe yourself as a writer? (Circle your answer.)

   GREAT GOOD OK NOT GOOD

Writing Workshop Questionnaire - Posttest

Name _____ Date _____

1. How do you feel when your teacher says that it is writing time?

   _____

   _____

2. Do you like to write? (Circle your answer.)

   YES NO SOMETIMES

   Why or why not?

   _____

   _____

3. Do you like the teacher to give you a topic or do you like to decide on a topic yourself? (Circle your answer.)

   TEACHER GIVES TOPIC I DECIDE ON TOPIC

   Why?

   _____

   _____

4. How would you describe yourself as a writer? (Circle your answer.)

   GREAT GOOD OK NOT GOOD

Primary Assessment Portfolio
Writing Rubric

1 (Early Beginning)	2 (Advanced Beginning)	3 (Early Independent)	4 (Advanced Independe
• no main idea	•has main idea with two supporting details	•clearly written main idea with more than two supporting details	•clearly written main idea, many supporting details, varied sentence structure, use of sensory and exact words
•incomplete sentences	•incomplete sentences		
•no opening or closing or title	•may have an opening, closing, or title but does not have all three	•has opening, closing, and title	•strong opening, closing and title
•beginning to use invented spelling	•primarily phonetic spelling	•primarily transitional spelling	•correct spelling
•inappropriate punctuation improper use of upper and lower case letters	•some inappropriate punctuation and upper case letters	•few errors in punctuation and use of upper case letters	•varied and correct use of punctuation, and upper case letters
•no logical order	•repetitive content with some logical order	•sentences in order with some use of order words (i.e. first, next, last, then, finally, etc.	•correct order using order words and correct form (i.e. paragraph, letter, etc.)

9/15/97